

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 178

June 27, 1996, 3:45 p.m.
Page S-7110 Temp. Record

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/Obsolete DoD Rifles to Gun Safety Group

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1997 . . . S. 1745. Craig motion to table the Lautenberg amendment No. 4218.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE AGREED TO, 71-29

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 1745, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1997, will authorize a total of \$267.3 billion in budget authority for national defense programs (the President requested \$254.3 billion). In real terms, this bill will authorize \$5.6 billion less, and the President requested \$18.6 billion less, than was provided in fiscal year (FY) 1996.

The Lautenberg amendment would repeal the Federal charter for the nonprofit Corporation for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and Safety. This action would stop the planned transfer of obsolete Defense Department M-1 rifles and ammunition to that corporation. The rifles instead would be destroyed, eventually, at an estimated cost of \$500,000 to \$3 million. In the meantime, \$2.5 million in annual storage and maintenance costs for keeping the weapons would continue to accrue.

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. Following debate, Senator Craig moved to table the amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

Title 16 of last year's defense authorization bill contains a carefully negotiated compromise for ending Federal support for the Civilian Marksmanship Program. It contains 14 sections and is nearly 10 pages long. It is not an item that was "slipped" into the bill, as has been falsely alleged; it is a negotiated deal between supporters and opponents of the program.

Under this compromise agreement, 176,000 M-1 Garand rifles from World War II and 150 million rounds of 30-caliber ammunition will be transferred to the new Corporation for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and Safety. Those rifles are obsolete--our colleagues talk about how they are "worth" \$76 million, and how we should not rob the taxpayers by giving away \$76 million when there are so many more worthwhile programs on which they would like to spend that amount, but in the next breath they talk about

(See other side)

YEAS (71)			NAYS (29)		NOT VOTING (0)	
Republicans (51 or 96%)	Democrats (20 or 43%)		Republicans (2 or 4%)	Democrats (27 or 57%)	Republicans (0)	Democrats (0)
Abraham	Hutchison	Baucus	Chafee	Akaka		
Ashcroft	Inhofe	Biden	Hatfield	Boxer		
Bennett	Jeffords	Bingaman		Bradley		
Bond	Kassebaum	Breaux		Bryan		
Brown	Kempthorne	Daschle		Bumpers		
Burns	Kyl	Dorgan		Byrd		
Campbell	Lott	Exon		Conrad		
Coats	Lugar	Ford		Dodd		
Cochran	Mack	Glenn		Feingold		
Cohen	McCain	Heflin		Feinstein		
Coverdell	McConnell	Hollings		Graham		
Craig	Murkowski	Inouye		Harkin		
D'Amato	Nickles	Johnston		Kennedy		
DeWine	Pressler	Kerrey		Kerry		
Domenici	Roth	Leahy		Kohl		
Faircloth	Santorum	Lieberman		Lautenberg		
Frahm	Shelby	Nunn		Levin		
Frist	Simpson	Robb		Mikulski		
Gorton	Smith	Rockefeller		Moseley-Braun		
Gramm	Snowe	Wellstone		Moynihan		
Grams	Specter			Murray		
Grassley	Stevens			Pell		
Gregg	Thomas			Pryor		
Hatch	Thompson			Reid		
Helms	Thurmond			Sarbanes		
	Warner			Simon		
				Wyden		

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

1—Official Business
2—Necessarily Absent
3—Illness
4—Other

SYMBOLS:

AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

how they want to destroy the rifles. Their argument does not make any sense. Destroying the rifles will cost up to \$3 million, or, alternatively, continuing to store them will cost \$2.5 million per year. Giving them to the Corporation, though, will not cost the Government anything. The ammunition, also, is of no value to the Army; it does not use 30-caliber ammunition. The main reason it has it at all is because of the Civilian Marksmanship Program, which paid for 85 percent of it through membership dues and fees. World War II vintage M-1 rifles are totally worthless to the Defense Department, and are in fact expensive for it to keep. Keeping them would not "save" \$76 million that our colleagues say could then be spent on their favorite social welfare programs--it would cost the Government money either through storage or destruction costs.

The U.S. Government supports numerous sports programs, such as the National Youth Sports Program (which reaches 70,000 Americans annually at a cost of \$134 per participant) but our colleagues do not complain about those programs. However, they vociferously opposed funding for the Marksmanship Program, which had a per person cost for the Government of 50 cents annually, and now they oppose this rifle transfer. Their objections were and are based on a knee-jerk reaction to the word "rifle." Anytime any firearm is mentioned, certain of our liberal colleagues from Eastern States instantly say "no." They automatically associate any firearm use with criminal psychopaths. This association is unfair, and in this case it is harmful. This program teaches civilians, including 350,000 young people annually, how to use firearms safely and accurately. Since 1903 there has not been a single accident in the program, and the training provided has undoubtedly prevented numerous accidental injuries and deaths that would otherwise have occurred. The program also has been used to train law enforcement officers, and has historically worked as a cost-effective recruitment tool for Army officers by giving them the opportunity to serve as positive role models to program participants.

The M-1 is not a firearm that is used by criminals--it is large, heavy, and impossible to conceal. It is valuable only for marksmanship training, for competitive shooting, and as a collector item. Further, before taking possession of one of these rifles, an applicant must comply with all existing laws, have a background check, be fingerprinted, attend a formal training program, fire 50 rounds under supervision, and wait 10 to 15 months. Convicted felons, firearm violators, and individuals who advocate the overthrow of the U.S. Government may not participate in the program. These requirements are much more rigorous than requirements that exist for obtaining the types of weapons that criminals actually use to commit crimes.

This program has more than 1,100 affiliated clubs in all 50 States with more than a half a million participants. These clubs are run by police athletic leagues, Boy Scout Troops, and similar organizations. This is not a National Rifle Association organization, as some of our colleagues have falsely alleged. These clubs sponsor shooting competitions and they teach firearm safety.

Allowing the Defense Department to transfer obsolete M-1 rifles to the Corporation for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and Firearm Safety will both save the Defense Department money and will help the Corporation in its efforts to promote the safe and responsible use of firearms. The Lautenberg amendment would block this transfer, and should therefore be tabled.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

The Lautenberg amendment would stop a \$76 million giveaway to the National Rifle Association (NRA). Last year, tucked away in the mammoth defense authorization bill, a little provision was added that says that surplus M-1 rifles, ammunition, and other miscellaneous items will be given to the National Corporation for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and Firearm Safety. That Corporation was created by that bill as a supposedly independent successor to the Army-run Civilian Marksmanship Program. The Civilian Marksmanship Program was started in 1903 as a military preparedness program when the Army found that most of its new recruits were totally unfamiliar with firearms. The belief was that a trained corps of civilians with marksmanship skills would be useful to prepare for future military conflicts. Over the years, the program gradually became just a taxpayer funded giveaway for civilian shooting clubs. Many of the participating clubs were run by the NRA, which used them to recruit new members. Between 1985 and last year, the Army spent roughly \$38 million on the program.

Last year, Congress decided to end the Army's support for this program for two reasons. First, some Senators thought that the Army should not be promoting firearm use by civilians, given the level of gun violence that exists. Second, some Senators thought that the Federal Government could put the money to better use, such as by spending it on education, the environment, or welfare programs. The Federal Government is strapped for cash, and is consequently failing to spend funds on numerous areas of great need.

Unfortunately, we have found out that Congress did not really end support for the Civilian Marksmanship Program, because at the same time that it made it independent it gave it a mammoth endowment. Weapons and ammunition worth \$76 million are to be transferred. In total, the newly "independent" corporation will get 176,218 M-1 rifles. We cannot imagine a worse decision. The Federal Government, as a matter of policy, does not transfer excess weapons to civilians. The policy is clear: "Surplus firearms may be sold only for scrap after total destruction by crushing, cutting, breaking, or deforming to be performed in a manner to ensure that the firearms are rendered completely inoperative and to preclude their being made operative." In other words, the Federal Government is not an arms merchant. The level of gun violence in America is already high enough without putting a couple hundred thousand M-1 rifles into general circulation. We should spend \$76 million more on social programs instead of giving away guns.

Our colleagues do not think there is any danger of these rifles falling into the wrong hands. In our opinion, the NRA, which is very involved in this program, is so extreme in its demand for the unfettered right to keep and bear arms that it is not an organization that can be trusted to keep control over these weapons. Further, we know that some militia groups have been involved in the program.

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We do not want to hear someday of a militia group making an attack using M-1 rifles that we could have ordered to be destroyed. We trust our colleagues agree, and will join us in voting against the motion to table the Lautenberg amendment.